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# FAMILY MANNERS

BY

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## FAMILY MANNERS.

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### I.

“MAX was really vexed with me to-day, Miss Fitts,” said Rosalie, as she came and seated herself in the sewing-room.

“What did you do ?” asked Miss Fitts.

“Why, nothing ; certainly nothing worth apologizing for. At lunch he was trying to help the preserves, and to tell something he was interested in at the same time. So he didn’t give any attention to the spoon ; and I watched the sloppy, ineffective way he was handling it, till I couldn’t keep quiet another minute. Said I, ‘For mercy’s sake, Max, just see what you’re doing ! How can you fool with the spoon that way ?’”

“Did that do any good ?” asked Miss Fitts.

“Why, yes ; he colored up, shut his mouth, and helped the preserves out right smartly. But he did not say another word the whole of lunch time.”

“You got your sweetmeats, my dear, but you stopped the flow of soul.”

“But to think of his laying up a little thing like that !”

“Oh, he didn’t lay it up, only he was momentarily hurt by your tone.”

“But it was unmannerly of him to help things so, clattering the dishes, and threatening to spill the syrup.”

“But you jarred the social atmosphere, and spilt the peace. That was more unmannerly.”

“O Miss Fitts! so it was.”

“Once I was at a table,” said Miss Fitts, “where a good-natured little lady was telling a humorous story. In the very midst of it her husband, who was peevish and tired, broke in, in a vexed tone, saying, ‘Mary, I wish you *would* sit straight in your chair!’ It was like cold water thrown on the company. She managed to answer pleasantly, and to finish her story; but the laughter over it was hollow, every one present had such vexation for her in his heart. I think, Rosalie, if she had sat upon the table it would not have been a worse breach of decorum than his. He had destroyed the pleasant social atmosphere.”

“Was my rudeness to Max as unpardonable as that?” asked Rosalie.

“Well, try it by this test. Suppose Max had been a guest; under the same circumstances, would you have spoken in the same way?”

“Why, no.”

“You’d have said something playful or kindly to call his mind back if he were inattentive. Why didn’t you do that for Max?”

“I might, I suppose. But, Miss Fitts, I do like to use a little snap with Max sometimes. I suppose that man who straightened his wife in the chair felt the same way. A little snap once in a while is such a satisfaction.”

“What does that mean, Rosalie?”

“Oh, I suppose it means that the lurking savage in us likes to get the upper hand sometimes, just as the black kitten likes to give you a pretty serious blow or scratch in the midst of playing with you.”

“The lurking savage!” mused Miss Fitts. “We don’t take him much into company. He doesn’t show well there; he would hardly be invited again; he can’t take on company manners. We only indulge him at home.”

“You see, one gets tired of company manners.”

“You mean the savage gets tired of them; not the lady, of course. What are they, my dear?”

“Oh, manners that fit one for company, I suppose.”

“Then I should think they ought to belong most to those with whom we keep company most.”

“You make no allowance for the savage, Miss Fitts.”

“Why not change the method, let him loose abroad, and keep him muzzled at home?”

“He could not survive that, you know.”

“No; he would either die a natural death for want of exercise, or else be clubbed to death by an indignant public. Instead of that we pamper him, and give him his head at home till he often gets so rampant he unfits his entertainers in the end to go in society at all. I know a family where that had really happened.”

“It must have been pleasant.”

“Yes. If you went there to tea, the pleasure would begin in this way: ‘These apple preserves,’ the mother would innocently say, ‘were made by a receipt of Mr. Brown’s grandmother.’ ‘No, they weren’t,’ Mr. Brown would break in hotly. ‘How you forget things, Julia! It was step-grandfather’s

first wife.' 'You never told me so before,' says Julia in an aggrieved tone. 'You said it was the one who never put salt in her bread.' 'I never said anything about her never putting salt in her bread,' retorts Mr. Brown. 'For all I know, she put salt in her bread till the day of her death.' 'O John, how you do dispute! You *did* say she never put salt in her bread.' 'Yes, father,' pipes up little Julia. 'you said it as much as twenty times.' 'Now *you* needn't put in your oar,' says young John: 'what do you know?' 'I know what I heard,' retorts little Julia. 'Father's no business to say he didn't say it.' 'There, Mrs. Brown,' says the father, 'see what impertinence you encourage in your girl!' 'It's your own blame, Mr. Brown; — and so on, and so on, and so on. There was never any end to it. It was, as the Scripture says, like the 'letting out of water.' And all the voices in that family got thin and sharp, and all the brows frowning, and the savage got so dictatorial there wasn't even an attempt made to disguise him. Those were good worthy people and church-members he lived with, too."

"Well, most people in civilized life do better than that," said Rosalie.

"The savage takes a less exasperating method in most places," replied Miss Fitts. "Sometimes he's only lazy and abstracted. He does not want to take the trouble to answer questions or remarks. The wife gets so accustomed to hearing hers received without reply, that she almost takes it as a matter of course. But what other lady than his wife would a man treat in that way? Then there's the savage of petty tyranny. Rosalie, it's most always in a woman, this one. 'Don't push your specs up on your

forehead ! ' she says. ' Why are you wearing your best hat ? I'll *hide* that book so you *shall* talk to me ! ' "

" Oh, I hate *that* savage ! " said Rosalie.

" It takes long patience to bear with him. Then there's the complaining one who never gets good steak or coffee. Do you think he would fret at any other table as he does at his own ? Why shouldn't we honor our own tables with pleasant expressions as well as other people's ? What makes a table worth honoring, Rosalie ? I don't know of any rule for heavenly bread but a sweet, grateful spirit in the heart of the one who breaks it."

" I've seen some bread," said Rosalie, smiling, " that not even that would lighten."

" Well, a sweet temper would redeem it for digestion better than a sour one. The spirit has its own power over the body and all it receives. And the savage, why, he's just that old thief who comes not but to steal, kill, and destroy."

" Miss Fitts, do you think we can kill the savage out and out, so as to be always lovely and gracious ? Things press so in this world, you know, and we get so hurried and worried. We push on just to get things done, and speak out to get them said in the shortest way possible, no matter whether the manner suits people or not."

" It can't be what God means," said Miss Fitts. " I don't believe that lives with such manners accomplish the most, or are rounded out to the noblest fulfilment. That was a beautiful thing Lowell said about Washington, our greatest man, you know,— the man of great trials, and great affairs, and great achievements. The poet talks about

‘ The habitual full-dress of his well-bred mind.’ ”

"O Miss Fitts, do you think the poet looked close?"

"I don't care whether he looked close or not. I say it's a beautiful thought. From my childhood up, Rosalie, I was always wanting to wear my best dress; but we can't do that, you know. We must go shabby and dusty and commonplace often, as regards the outer woman; but here's a possibility for the mind. — habitual full-dress. Doesn't that delight all the artistic and poetic feeling you've got? Your soul always at its best, — balanced, even, calm, considerate, seemly; and the mind dictates the manners, you know. Nothing shabby, slovenly, roughly flung out, will come from it in its decorum of full-dress. Of course not: but ways serene, gracious, appropriate, wouldn't they be enough of themselves to decorate the poorest life, and lift it into beauty? What George MacDonald calls 'that huge slug, and wearifullest dragon of all, the commonplace,' seems to vanish out of life at the very thought of such manners."

"Your ideals are too high, Miss Fitts."

"Not too high to be aimed for. And talking of ideals brings me back to that beloved one of our American civilization I've spoken of before. We must talk about it again."

## II.

“AND what about our new ideal American civilization, Miss Fitts ?” asked Rosalie.

“Why, there are two kinds of civilizations, my dear ; one where the savage is disguised for purposes of social pleasure, and one where he is trampled on for purposes of Christianity. Which do you believe in, Rosalie ?”

“Oh, the last, of course !”

“Well, in our new ideal American civilization, we are not going to veneer the savage, or gild him, or hide him ; we are going to exterminate him. We are not going to take our manners from without—company manners—we are going to let the manners within shine out.”

“It reminds me,” said Rosalie, smiling, “of a nursery rhyme my mother used to say to us :

“‘Be cleanly and polite at home,  
Then you’re prepared when friends do come.’”

“Exactly ; that covers the ground very well. That’s where our civilization must start, Rosalie ; or it must work back to that, to be perfect. There’ll be no flaw in your good manners when they’re habitual to father and mother and every family friend first of all.”

“Would it ever be possible ?”

“Not without going back still closer home, my dear, to the first tie of all, to the manners between ourselves and God.”

“O Miss Fitts !”

“In them we live. You can’t get nearer home than that. There’s the prayer the children pray every week in Sunday-school : ‘Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.’ What a prayer that is for the enforcement of real perfect manners ! It works right down at the spring of them. ‘The words of my mouth’ and ‘the meditation of my heart ;’ there’s no getting back of those, is there, Rosalie ? ‘Be acceptable ;’ that can’t mean, I think, simply just, true, and pure, it must mean also gentle, gracious, cheerful, lovely. That’s just a prayer for perpetual sound, living beauty in every relation of life. If there’s any redemption from the savage it’s in that.

“That old barbarian,” she continued after a little pause ; “husband or wife, children and kin, house and furniture, they’re only extensions to him of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ Still he is the centre of his mean little world, and he brags and demands and dictates out of his great ugly selfishness. When people muzzle him, and dress him up, and take him abroad, still he looks out of their eyes and coarsens their smiles, and gives the sense of insincerity, so that nobody is quite happy and free where he is, even though he may not be discovered.”

“You make him seem very dreadful, Miss Fitts, and yet I had never before thought there was so much harm in a little fretting and jarring at home.”

“There’s the harm of poisoning the water at the spring. The people who bear with the savage are either worn out and depressed, or very likely hurt in moral character by catching his ways, or trying to

deceive or overbear him. The children catch his mood, and learn his habit. They grow *used to it*. Think of that! And they'll go and hand down the cruel legacy to another generation. Then, Rosalie, nothing makes more family quarrels than just carelessness about family manners. I knew a sister who did not mean to be unkind, but who had a careless, slighting way of speaking to her brothers. By and by some property came to her and them, which it would have been to the advantage of all to have held undivided. To her surprise she found her brothers' hearts were so alienated they were not willing to hold any property in common with her. She thought their feeling very groundless, and resented it. She had no idea her ill-manners to them had made the trouble. And I know an excellent lady whose relatives are always on the point of vowing they will never go to see her again, because, if she is a little pre-occupied with her own affairs at the time of their visit, she will not rouse herself to give them any attention. She is either so constrained and silent, or so unable to talk of anything but the matter at present on her mind, that the visit is simply a strain upon their charity to make allowance for her. She has a right to expect that from relatives, of course; yet it is hard, when they see how differently other visitors are treated, not to feel that she gives her kindred less respect than they deserve. She is always careful to be charming in general society."

"She ties up the savage then?"

"Yes, Rosalie. Do you know when I hate him most?"

"When he slighted the children, Miss Fitts?"

"Oh, no, dear; not even then! But when his want

of regard for kindred shows itself to the aged. You know the political economy of the savage in his natural state is to put the grandparents outside the village."

"You shall not say there is anything like that among us, Miss Fitts."

"Well, here is a saying I cut from a paper the other day, that puts it in a very gentle way, Rosalie: '*If Heaven should grant one more gift to this country, the mistake would not be great were it a more sacred oberrance of parentage.*' What does that mean if the savage has not been showing his native propensities?"

"How does he show them?"

"Well, we're a busy, pushing, aspiring people, always with *ends* to be carried,—so *many* ends. People in middle life feel the pull of the future more than the touch of the past, and it often happens there's no time for grandma or grandpa. It may be she's at no little pains some fine morning to get out to see 'dear Adelaide' and her children. She gets a cheerily spoken welcome, but she feels instantly that it is a little forced. Presently she learns that dear Adelaide is going to have company this evening. She is *so* sorry. 'But I know you'll just excuse me, mother, while I direct about the salad; and then you can go up-stairs with me while I tell Ann how to put up the curtains.'

"Mother wants to help, it may be, but her trembling fingers are not as used to curtain-pins as Ann's deft ones, and there is no time for sentiment. So she sits by very sweetly and meekly, glad to be allowed sufferance on the outer edge of this busy life. She presently asks for the children, for whom

her heart has such a special tenderness. ‘The children? Well, it is too bad, mother, but they are dressing for their walk, and if they see you they’ll make a fuss, and want to stay at home. I can’t have them round just now, and I don’t want them to lose their walk, either.’

“Of course grandma meekly acquiesces, for experience has taught her to be meek, and she lets go her disappointment in a very gentle little sigh. She thinks it best by and by to make some pleasant excuse for departure, and tries to forget that her heart has gone down, down, down, at sight of this busy life that has no hearty, loving, grateful acknowledgment of her claim in it.”

“Miss Fitts,” said Rosalie, “I am just like that with Aunt Maria.”

“Yes, dear, too often; and you are only one of many. The other day, Grandpa Robinson, staff in hand, came down to dine with his son Robert. ‘If I don’t catch him at meal-times. I shall never see him,’ he said to Adelaide, cheerfully. ‘He has had so many engagements, you know,’ she answered. Presently Robert came in with pre-occupied face, in which more surprise than cordiality dawned at sight of his father. ‘Oh, how are you, father?’ he said; and after a hasty shake of the hand, he turned right about to be absorbed in his wife’s overflow of talk about her own morning’s matters, the servants, the callers, the children. Grandpa sat by listening, and presently betook himself to coaxing the youngest child with his watch. Of course he was hurt at the rudeness of the want of any reference to himself in the manners of the two, but how could he even own it to himself from his own son?”

“But, oh, they didn’t mean to be so bad, Miss Fitts.”

“No, dear; they would want their parents to believe in their love all the same: but see the harm of such carelessness, Rosalie. When love has been bluffed off by a succession of such experiences, it betakes itself to such services as it can render among orphan-asylums and the needy poor; and the uses of grandmothers are actually being lost sight of in this generation.”

“Oh, no, Miss Fitts; there cannot be many who do as you have described.”

“Scores and scores of them, Rosalie; well-meaning, respected American ladies and gentlemen. It’s the lurking savage again. He has no use for grandmothers if he is not poor enough to need their labors.”

“It is you who are savage now, Miss Fitts.”

“Yes, dear; and knowing that I might merge my anger in sorrow as I see the day of judgment coming, it may be, in the sad penalty of ungrateful children, children bred without the softening, heart-enlarging effect of a practical training in reverence. Let me tell you something I witnessed from my sewing-corner behind a portière the other day. There is a beautiful old gentleman from whom most people think it’s an honor to get a word or even a look. He has a new daughter-in-law, and he had come with such a lovely, kind face, and such a courteous manner, to call upon her. Well, for a few minutes she fluttered about prettily enough, amusing herself with showing him her many bridal gifts, and the disposition she had made of them. Then came in one of her young married friends. Without the least sense of inde-

corum they rushed at once into a comparison of houses, furniture, and shopping experiences, leaving the old gentleman as utterly out of their conversation as if he had not been in existence. He listened a while with lifted eyebrows, then felt for his cane, and rose to withdraw, making some courteous pretext for departure, that his leave-taking might not seem a too pointed reproof. He need not have troubled his decorous soul about that. Two cats upon a fence would have as little sense of observances due to outsiders as those young women. They were too selfish even to suspect their misdemeanor."

"And I am like them, Miss Fitts," said Rosalie, hanging her head in shame. "If Aunt Maria comes in when I am studying my German, it just seems to me as if I could not give the time to make things pleasant for her. You see I am so savagely selfish. I wish you'd talk to me about the uses of grandmothers."

"My dear, did you never think of the stores of treasure there must be in a long, good life,—one that by patience and sweetness and humbleness has been getting nearer and nearer to God till it is almost ready to pass out of sight? Do you never want to explore it a little before it goes? What if it hasn't been marked by any very conspicuous events or achievements, such as would call the attention of men? Didn't our Lord tell the Jews over and over again that fulness of life was not in such things? It is fulness of heart, feeling, feeling for things human and divine, that makes a rich life. Who has more of that than your Aunt Maria? God has been building it up in her, little by little, out of simple, common, humble experiences that she took into the

light of the Gospel, and made into a good *true* life. Do you never want to search out how it was done? Would you get anything out of your Goethe better worth knowing? Folks are delighted when a great writer searches souls, and holds them up to view, no matter if they are humble every-day souls. But of all who rush to read, how many ever set to work to study souls for themselves? Least of all the ripe triumphant souls that sit at the gate of heaven. Shall I tell you what set me thinking about this, Rosalie? It may help to show the uses of grandmothers."

"I wish you would."

"Well, I had a grandmother who was living when the Civil War broke out. She was old then, and used to sit in her rocker by the window with a little black Testament in her hand. Oh, how I could bless the book when I think how it furnished forth her failing days and wakeful nights!"

"Well, one morning she watched a regiment march by for the seat of war. She looked up at me with a whole, strong woman's soul in her faded eyes, saying, 'I have lived through two wars, and I never thought to see another!'"

"Lived through two wars!" Think of all that meant, Rosalie,—all the heart-experience, all the dread, courage, sorrow, trust, patriotic pain, and joy! Her own brother was lost on the border in the War of 1812. Her hands had helped illuminate for Gen. Scott's victories. Her prayers were following the soldiers that now were to fight it out under Grant. That set me thinking. I wanted to know what had passed in her soul in the days upon days gone by. So I began to question, and I found out how her good

life began. Would you like to know, Rosalie? It holds more about the uses of grandmothers."

"Go on, Miss Fitts, please."

"Well, the clearest early recollection she had was of the paralytic grandmother whose little maid and nurse she was. Father and mother were working people. Folks did not have hospital nurses and paid companions in those days. So it was the little granddaughter who brought the staff, and poured the drops, and put wood on the fire; listened to the simple Bible wisdom, and the Revolutionary traditions; slept within call at night; had her heart, her mind, her hand educated together by the service. And when one night the call from God came, it was the child who first perceived in the morning that grandmother could no longer speak nor hear; the child who had a heart already grown large enough for sacred grief; the child who learned, as Samuel learned, that God is near, and from the unseen had gently drawn her friend to Himself."

"Miss Fitts," said Rosalie, after a little silence, "there are many people now who would not like their children to have such an experience. Many are unwilling children should have much to do with aged people. They think it is unhealthy."

"Yes, I know. I can't help feeling, Rosalie, as if that fear sprang out of a real blind heathen regard for the body, and anxiety for the bodily welfare before all things. It is the old belief cropping up again, that man lives by the body alone and not by every word of God. But God has set the children and the aged in families together, with reciprocal duties. In the case of the child we have been talking about, at least, its early years preceded a long,

robust, active life, with scarcely a sick day in it; and one gathered to the fathers in a full age.

"And, Rosalie," she presently continued, "there is another way in which I see people defrauding children of the word of God in these days, that I am going to speak about right here."

"What is that?"

"It is getting to be more and more the way now, when death comes into a home, to hide the knowledge, or at least the full meaning of it, from children who are no longer babies, but old enough to understand anything wisely put before them. Again and again I have seen them packed off to some neighbor's nursery to play with toys while the last solemnities are going on in their homes. And so God's great, beautiful lesson of how the beyond is forever and forever beckoning to us, how the passing on *belongs*, is the universal crowning gift of human days, is not told them; and it might be opened so gently and simply in childhood, with happier results than could ever be given again, it seems to me."

"Your ideals are too high, Miss Fitts."

"But think of the reverse lesson, Rosalie, that any intelligent child will draw for himself from being sent out of the way of death: that it is something dreadful, something to be screened away from thought, shut out of sight, passed over in speech, and if possible, in recollection. Such a lesson seems to me not only in every way demoralizing, but likely to give him a coward dread of death that will be a torture all his life long."

There was a little silence between Rosalie and her friend after this, till the girl presently recurred to the subject from which they had diverged.

"Won't you tell me some more about the uses of grandmothers?" she asked.

"If there were no other uses, my dear," said Miss Fitts, "it would be enough for us to go to them to study what family manners should be. Wait for one of those times when the pressure of engagements lulls a little, and Robert and his wife bethink themselves it is a long time since they have spent an evening with mother. Then we'll go too, and get another view of family manners."

## III.

"WE were going with Robert and his wife to see their mother, you know, Miss Fitts." said Rosalie by way of reminder.

"Yes, dear; we can go now, if you like. They think it will be 'quite a rest,' and they are going to be very free and gracious. You can enter with them, and see the delighted welcome they receive. Grandmother will take their wraps herself, if they will let her. She is solicitous that they have easy chairs, and come to the fire; not too solicitous, though. She proffers her attentions a little timidly, though so eagerly, for she has learned that old people do not always know what young people want. But how her eyes shine, and how kind her face is! What a lovely grace of self-forgetfulness there is in her movements! As 'we' begin to talk, what beautiful and touching sympathy she has with 'us' in our tales of 'ourselves' and 'our children.' How feelingly she takes the little trials we have had! how she is pleased almost to tears over our pleasures! how she pardons our little boastings and vanities and selfishnesses! When the stream of our story at last fails, with what shy grace she brings out whatever little treasure of her quiet life she judges will give us entertainment! The bright sayings of our children first, treasured up since their last visit to her; then perhaps little scraps in praise of Robert's favorite candidate, which she

has cut from her paper; or little stories from the letters of old friends about their children, the companions of his youth; she has treasured them up for him. Or she has some bit of innocent gossip which may interest Adelaide; or some housekeeping hint cut from some journal; or some joke or pun, even, which she thinks might bring a smile to either face. In her thoughtful, leisurely life, it is evident which way her thoughts have tended. Failing other things, with little apologetic smiles she will bring her patch-work or her knitting to show,—such funny, old-fashioned fancy-work! But they may make all the fun of it they like, so it will give them a little entertainment. And when other resources are exhausted, see her going herself to bring her little old-fashioned cookies upon an old-fashioned china plate. The confectioner's cakes of more elegant entertainments seem not to have spoiled Robert's appetite for those dainty cookies. He talks and nibbles till the plate is empty. They linger by the fire till the clock strikes ten, and go away saying the evening has been a real rest. Why does it not occur to them, Rosalie, to try in such simple ways as the grandmother has used,—ways of self-forgetting devotion,—to make *her* visits to them 'a real rest'?"

"Miss Fitts, do you think it possible all members of families could be as lovely to one another as that mother to her children?"

"Why not? It must be one of the reasons why such lives, schooled in unselfishness, linger among us, and are not sooner removed to the upper kingdom, that we may learn their manners, and grow gracious and considerate as they are."

"But it is so dreadfully hard to be unselfish; and

besides, it won't do to efface one's self entirely. We have to fight sometimes."

"What about, my dear? I wish people would consider the family manners of that noble gentleman Abraham. Hear how he spoke when there was a quarrel between his servants and Lot's. — a quarrel that threatened maybe to spread upward, and divide the masters. 'Why should there be strife between us?' he says, '*for we be brethren.*' What a sense of propriety there was in that, Rosalie! And then how courteous and gentle he was to his cousin, pointing out the land before them, and saying, 'Take your choice first: the right hand or the left, as it pleases thee.' Oh, when I see brothers and sisters quarrelling over a will, I can but wish they had some of Abraham's dignity of feeling when he said, '*for we be brethren.*'"

"But, Miss Fitts, you know the land isn't as wide nowadays. We are more crowded together, and we can't waive our rights always in that lordly way."

"Can't we? Well, did you ever notice Christ's way of dealing with family quarrels? There's a great deal to be learned from it. Instead of soothing the one who complained, or even inquiring into the justice of his cause, he just turned him right back to the remembrance of his own shortcomings."

"That seems a little hard."

"That man who said, 'Speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me.' he must have thought his cause a just one, or he never would have brought it to one like Christ. What was the reply he got? 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possessest.' Then there was Martha's complaining of

Mary. She felt *her* cause was just. ‘Carest thou not that my sister has left me to serve alone?’ she asks. She only got her thought turned back to her own mistake. ‘Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about much serving, and but one thing is needful,’ said Christ. Does any one complain of the mote in his brother’s eye? Christ tells him only to think about plucking the beam out of his own. Does any one think it too much to forgive his brother seventy times? Christ offers a parable to show him how much the Lord may have to forgive *him*.”

“Don’t you think it a little hard, Miss Fitts?”

“Wait a minute, dear. Don’t you see, if people would only ease off their grudges by turning the jealousy against themselves, after the fashion of Christ’s teaching, how much it would save?”

“We should just have to efface ourselves.”

“No, dear, we should just enlarge ourselves. We should just *rise up* by every injury. Our real lives would grow rich, strong, pure, self-possessed. There is *no* injury but soul-injury. That was the secret of Christ’s ‘hardness,’ as you are ready to call it. People don’t understand. Oh, the miserable waste I’ve seen people make wrangling over a parent’s will! I don’t mean the waste of money among lawyers; that’s the least part of the waste. I mean the waste of joy, generosity, trust, love, helpful, energetic thought! Heart-burnings! Oh, isn’t that an awfully expressive word, Rosalie? It seems to speak of the fire that consumes, yet is unfailingly fed, such as belongs only to the world of retribution. I don’t like to think of it, dear. That any earthly good or harm should be suffered to bring us *heart-burnings*! If one speck of that flame were blown over upon you, wouldn’t you

hasten to smother it if your earthly all must be heaped upon the blaze? Please God, I would. People don't understand; that's the trouble.

“I used to be told when I was a child,” she continued, “about two poor, lonely, old sisters, who had inherited a little house with one room. They quarrelled, and drew a chalk line across the floor of their room, on either side of which each lived, never speaking to or recognizing the other. Each cooked her own little meal, and ate it on her own little table. Each swept and washed her own side of the floor. People did not like to go to see them, it was ‘so awkward.’ And a just sense of shame in their silly, unnatural way of living, hindered them from going to see others. They grew year by year more solitary, dull, and crazed. At last one, with white face, came to tell the neighbors that the other had died. Upon the threshold she fell in a paralysis, and in a few hours had died also. So one fate joined them in death as in life. But indeed, what had life been to them but a living death? When they drew that chalk line it was not to divide portions, merely; rather it cleft life asunder, and wounded it to death. For each, all wholesome, joyous, useful life withered away. It’s always so when folks quarrel, dear. Draw your line with invisible chalk; let it divide you from your brother by a State’s breadth, or a half-world’s breadth,—all the same it has cut through your life. ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ said Cain. ‘Yes,’ said God, ‘and moreover he was your keeper, part of the portion, the joy, and safety of your life. And when you slew him you slew those also. And now you walk in danger, loneliness, fear, and shame.’”

“Miss Fitts, you begin talking about common things, and presently bring one short up on the edge of an abyss.”

“It is because life seems to lie along the edges of them, dear. Life is so solemn. And we play our little self-assertions along the edge of the abyss, and give our captive savage his little liberties there. Now and then comes a tragedy here, and a tragedy there. We see them as through a mist, and think they belong to some queer world of the newspapers, not to our world. It is all one world after all. You speak sharp words to Max, and he is silent and indignant. But presently his good absorbs the evil. Some other woman speaks as heedlessly to some other man, not as fortunate as Max. It frets and inflames. He goes out predisposed to anger or despair. It is Satan’s opportunity. Temptation meets him. He may wreak his wrong upon another; he may desert the unkindly home; he may even by his own rash hand quit this fretting life. You see we *must* kill the savage, Rosalie, and open the door for the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

“The Spirit of Life,” mused Miss Fitts. “Ah, Rosalie, what other name for Christianity is as true as that?”

## IV.

“MISS FITTS,” said Rosalie, “let’s come back from principles to practice, and consider just how I shall amend my manners at home.”

“Observe the loveliest ways you have among the loveliest people you know in society, and then bring them home with you.”

“At our Literary Club,” said Rosalie, “we have learned to avoid topics of discussion that may arouse temper. Have we got to restrict ourselves in that way at home?”

“Yes. If your uncle or your brother has a different opinion about the tariff from the rest of the family, don’t fret him by making talk that will measure the difference.”

“And what if he is a Methodist and we are Baptists?”

“Be still more careful. Emphasize the common Christianity. You can do it no service greater than that.”

“And suppose I think women have a right to practise medicine, and he doesn’t think so?”

“Let it go. It’s action, not talk, which helps that cause.”

“But a good argument is real fun. Miss Fitts.”

“Oh, of course you may discuss all those things in a friendly way when you are both in a good temper, or when you have him to yourself. But don’t start

the subject in a company where he knows he is in the minority, and persecute him with it so as to make a strain upon his self-control. Irritating talk has no place in families."

"In the loveliest society I know," said Rosalie, considering, "we don't criticise one another quite as freely as at home. Imagine my saying to Mrs. Gown as I would to Max, 'Your new coat is horribly loud, my dear!'"

"Or speaking as you did to your Aunt Maria when you told her the bow on her bonnet was in a hurry to get to church first."

"Or as Max did to me when he said my bangs looked as if the cat had licked them."

"Well," said Miss Fitts, "you are a good-natured family here, and every thing is allowable to good nature. But such little family compliments do not always fall harmless. I have known a sensitive child so injured by jocose comments made habitually by brothers and sisters on some personal defect, that she could never recover from the consciousness of it, and was made stiff and awkward by it in company all her life long. I knew a little girl whose teeth were crooked. Her brother used to say, 'Emmie's teeth look as if they stood in a gale.' She told me afterward that it made her miserable whenever she was obliged to open her mouth in company. No, Rosalie, I don't like the savage even when he is playful."

"It is very easy to be critical, Miss Fitts."

"Yes; we Americans are a race of idealists. But just now, unfortunately, our idealism runs too much in the direction of material things. We want perfect dress, perfect looks, perfect surroundings. It makes

us uneasy, hard, and thankless. It leads us away from valuing the beauty and goodness we have about us, in the demand for more. From high to low we are all striving upward. There's a constant effort for a better estate, more money for labor, more achievement for time, more knowledge, more ease, more result. It's right, but it has its dangers. We forget to value our gifts in the habit of grasping. It is one secret of that irreverence I was talking about a while ago. A man planning eagerly for his children, feeling his own disadvantages, and promising himself they shall not feel the same, forgets the earnest labor with which his own father and mother set him on the vantage-ground from which he works. In his eager purpose to give greater things to his children, he undervalues what was given to himself. It would be better for him to stop and look back, and measure the will and the love spent for himself and all it achieved. Once I was going through a hospital, Rosalie, and I was touched by the pleasure of an invalid in a box of mixed candies that had been sent her. She had beguiled a weary hour by sorting the different kinds in the box, and arranging them in little piles of contrasted colors. She had even made a list of the number of each kind in a little note-book she had, as five caramels, six chocolate creams, ten peppermints, and so forth. She smiled, half-ashamed at the childishness of the record, as she showed it to me, but she said, 'I make the most of little things lying here, because there is so little I can do.'

"Now wouldn't it reform one's manners at home, Rosalie, if we would stop 'doing much' and begin counting up our sweets? They would lead us to more graciousness. There's Max; forget how he can

clatter with the spoons, and think of the hearty charm of his voice in telling a story; forget his inattention, and think of his delighted willingness to pass things when he has once wakened to your need; of his beautiful forgetfulness of all the little sordid details of life, through interest in life itself. What does he care if the bread is baked too hard, or the china nicked on the edge, or the soup not as hot as it should be? He eats and talks so contentedly, it does one good to see him."

"Yes," said Rosalie, "Max is a good fellow. I know I ought not to expect him to be perfect."

"But you let your poor little ideals of what is perfect blind to you to the most perfect things of all. There's your Aunt Maria, who disturbs you so by always having her cap awry. Count up her sweet-  
nesses if you can, Rosalie. How unfailingly lovely she is when you point out her delinquency! How sweetly she thanks you, and tells you are 'so kind' to set it right for her!' How she always trusts you for every sort of goodness, and never thinks it possible you can be wrong! What love she puts into those mittens she knits for you! How she would like to smuggle you into the best chair, and put all her spare money into your pocket! To think of your actually *snubbing* her, then, because her cap often gets awry, and she makes some old-fashioned slips in her grammar!"

Rosalie hung her head in penitence.

"Count up your mercies in your friends," continued Miss Fitts, "and see how it will mend your manners to them. After all, it's not the rough word or deed in itself; it is the hard, scornful thought prompting it, that is so unforgivable. The most scrupulous smoothness covering that would not give pleasure.

There is no dividing between your manners and your soul."

"One must speak the truth at home to one's own people," said Rosalie, "and speak it out in a hurry, too, sometimes, without waiting to choose words."

"Yes; but it is love that can speak it most fully, and speak it to the most avail. Criticism whips out its lash in scorn or anger, and gets anger in return. Love speaks its warning or its pain in a tone that is a caress, and the heart opens at its word. Now tell me, who speaks the plainest truths in this house without making any one angry?"

"Aunt Maria," said Rosalie. "She says the most fearfully plain things to people so simply and sweetly. It often takes my breath away to hear her, but nobody gets angry. Instead of that they're pleased. It is most surprising."

"No, it is not. Her reproof is nothing but a token of love; and everybody feels it. Everybody loves to know they are loved."

"But hear what Mr. Browning says," said Rosalie, getting a book from the shelves, and turning the leaves rapidly. "He doesn't think it's so easy to tell unpleasant truths."

And she began to read thus:

"Because it is the glory and good of Art,  
That Art remains the one way possible  
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.  
How look a brother in the face, and say,  
Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou, yet art blind,  
Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length,  
And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith!"

But Art wherein man nowise speaks to men,  
Only to mankind.—Art may tell a truth  
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,  
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word."

Rosalie looked up to smile at the considering face of Miss Fitts. "I'm not sure," said the latter, that I know what he means by that last, — that about the '*mediate word*.'"

"Oh, I think he means the word that is just the right medium to convey your truth."

"Then it must be a loving word, and not have any thing in it about 'long ears' or 'foolishness' either. That line lets out the secret of his trouble about truth-speaking, Rosalie. It's scorn and anger at the bottom of the truth that hinders him. Your Aunt Maria could tell him better than that."

"Oh, to think of Aunt Maria giving points to Mr. Browning!"

"And I don't know exactly what he means by art, either," continued Miss Fitts, "but I guess it's work that springs out of the love of something beautiful; that wants to show or make some beauty, isn't it?"

"I should think so."

"Then if a man has a clear love of some beautiful truth, and a clear love of his brother's beautiful soul to add to it, I should think he might find a beautiful art of helping and teaching his brother by straightforward, spoken words, as well as by an art of writing for many to read, or painting or carving for many to see."

"Very few have it, Miss Fitts."

"I know. It's the consciousness of cold dislike of a brother's sin, that ties our tongues. If instead of this our hearts were warm with love of the hidden beauty, the possible angel in him, we could make the simplest straightforward reproof sound like a blessing. It's for want of love the truth turns sneak and coward in us, and infects with scowls and sneers and

discontent, the cold heart that has not life enough to wing it, and send it out like a blessing."

"Well, Miss Fitts," said Rosalie, who had been turning the leaves of her book again, "and after all, Mr. Browning is with you; hear this:

"Love bids touch truth, and endure truth, and embrace  
Truth; though embracing truth love crush itself.  
'Worship not me, but God,' the angels urge;  
That is love's grandeur."

"I like that," said Miss Fitts earnestly. "Yes, that's the very self-forgetting spirit your Aunt Maria has when she tells you or Max you are doing wrong. She prizes your love above every thing on earth, but she loves you too much to be bidding for it. If I were you, I'd learn to speak corrective truth with her and with the angels, instead of putting it into the hand of your savage to hack with as if it were a hatchet. Folks are pretty sure to do one or the other."

## V.

“ You know, Rosalie,” said Miss Fitts, the next time the two were sewing together, “ it has been said the leaven of New England was powerful enough to work through the whole of our country. I’m always proud when I think of it, and joyful too. But there was a fault in that leaven, nevertheless, a savor of bitterness that we ought somehow to get rid of. The real Puritan New Englander, you know, he made his ‘yea,’ yea, and his ‘nay,’ nay. He dealt with life seriously. He thought it right to be very plain in his speech and demeanor. Little pleasantries that might be frivolous, little compliments that might be hollow, little poesies or prettinesses that might be vain or misleading, he gave them no place in his daily speech or manners. Moreover, his high and holy things he held in reverent awe. He could not speak of them in the familiarity of homely love, but always in some reverent and stately way. It was the same with his strongest natural feelings and affections. They were all sacred; like the dark best room in his house, too sacred for hourly, daily using. Well, that was good in its way, but it was carried too far, and see what harm came of it. To a great extent in New England the fine, high, lovely things got left out of expression, that is, out of habitual, free expression. People did not know how to say them when they would. Mothers yearned in silence they could only

break on their dying beds, and brothers and sisters looked dumbly and awkwardly at one another when they were moved.

“But much worse than that followed. People must talk, you know, and the best being out of custom, the talk got to be about all sorts of commonplace, material things. Yes, and harsh, ironical, critical things got place also. From a dread of too smooth speech, the rough side of the tongue got free play. It has its falsities just as much as the other, and very cruel and mischievous ones too.

“There was a young minister I knew once, of the very bluest blood of New England, with all its stanch qualities and all its pride too. A keen, good woman who watched him said, ‘He’s so afraid of cant that he *cants on the other side*.’ She was shrewd enough to understand his rough, jocular talk, playing at worldliness, and shying lightly round the edges of sacred themes; but many could not understand. They could not see the real reverence under it all, and they were misled and offended. There is too much ‘canting on the other side.’

“Of course, as he was a real good man, his life was going to speak for him after awhile; but by that time he would most likely have taught his tongue to side with it. It was not for nothing Paul told us that ‘with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’ Every good soul must sooner or later find its way to spiritual speech, or else”—

“Else what, Miss Fitts?”

“Why, what if you hardened the ground over a seed?”

“It could not grow.”

“No more can feeling that’s never given expression.

Feeling is a seed, expression is the stalk and leaves it grows by ; action is the stalk, words are the leaves, fresh, airy, palpitating in the wind, and gleaming in the sunshine. Repress the leaves, and the stalk begins to wither; the root itself will presently die. I heard a little story once that illustrates the fact. There was a railroad accident where a poor farmer's wife was taken out bleeding and unconscious. The doctor and a kind woman were working over her when her husband came in and stood a moment looking on in disturbed silence. His cheeks were sucked in, his eyebrows lifted, his hands in his pockets. Presently, with some effort, he cleared his throat to speak ; and as the doctor looked up he asked, 'Ye didn't see a new tin dipper lyin' round where ye picked her up, did ye ?'

"He got no answer from the indignant doctor, and presently strayed out again in search of his dipper. Meanwhile his wife opened her eyes, and at once asked for her husband. 'He's safe,' said the doctor shortly. She felt his curt tone, and faint as she was she sensed the situation. 'He's a dreadful feelin' man,' she said, 'but he don't never say much.'"

"Oh, Miss Fitts, perhaps it was partly true."

"It *had been* true, dear. But 'never sayin' much' as month by month and year by year went by, 'the feelin'' in him had dried away till it was no more than the withered kernel in last season's nut. His poor wife kept up the fiction of its being there still, but in reality there was no more than sufficed to look after tin dippers and such things as might be talked about in common days."

"You've brought a pretty severe charge against New England, Miss Fitts."

“I know it; and in the real old New England life I can’t help feeling that it was not only soft words that were left out more than they should have been, but caresses also, and many little customs of complaisance and pleasantness. The good father’s life — not his speech, mind you — was always saying, ‘Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.’ It is a grand, beautiful saying, and ought to satisfy the most jealous heart that ever beat. But after all, sons do sometimes think it would be pleasant to be given a kid, and invited to make merry with their friends. Birthday cakes and candles have their uses; roses and kisses, — God made them for daily purposes. The ring on the finger, and the best robe, might sometimes help, perhaps, to keep the prodigal at home as well as to welcome him back. Little unneeded favors and surprises, just for love’s sake, — they warm the heart so! Love’s extravagances! Mary with her alabaster box knew they had rights. The Master knew it too, looking down upon her and saying, ‘Trouble her not.’ The perfume filled the house, they say. Yes, and it seems to linger in all the outer courts of the Kingdom of Heaven down to this day. And remember, Rosalie, there’s not a human soul looking at us out of asking eyes but is saying, ‘Me ye have not always.’ The folks we live with now, how can we be too good to them? The family groups, they shift like the pieces in a kaleidoscope. It’s brothers and sisters awhile, husbands and wives awhile, parents and children awhile; then all the shapes and the colors are gone, and others are glowing in their places.”

“Hush, Miss Fitts,” said Rosalie; “don’t talk so. I do not feel so. I feel as if nothing could change here in our home.”

“But in reality, Rosalie, how much time have you in which to be good to Max, let us say? He is eighteen, and is hesitating between college and business. Once his choice is made, you will see him only at intervals, and by and by he will probably make some home of his own. Then your times of being with him will be brief, and perhaps far between.”

“I shall always love him,” said Rosalie pitifully.

“Yes, but you will have little chance *to be good* to him. It’s the same in regard to your mother. It may not be more than two or three years before you will be called to leave her, and then the main part of your life, your efforts, your services, will be in some other home than hers.”

“Hush, Miss Fitts,” said Rosalie; “I do not want to talk with you any more.”





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